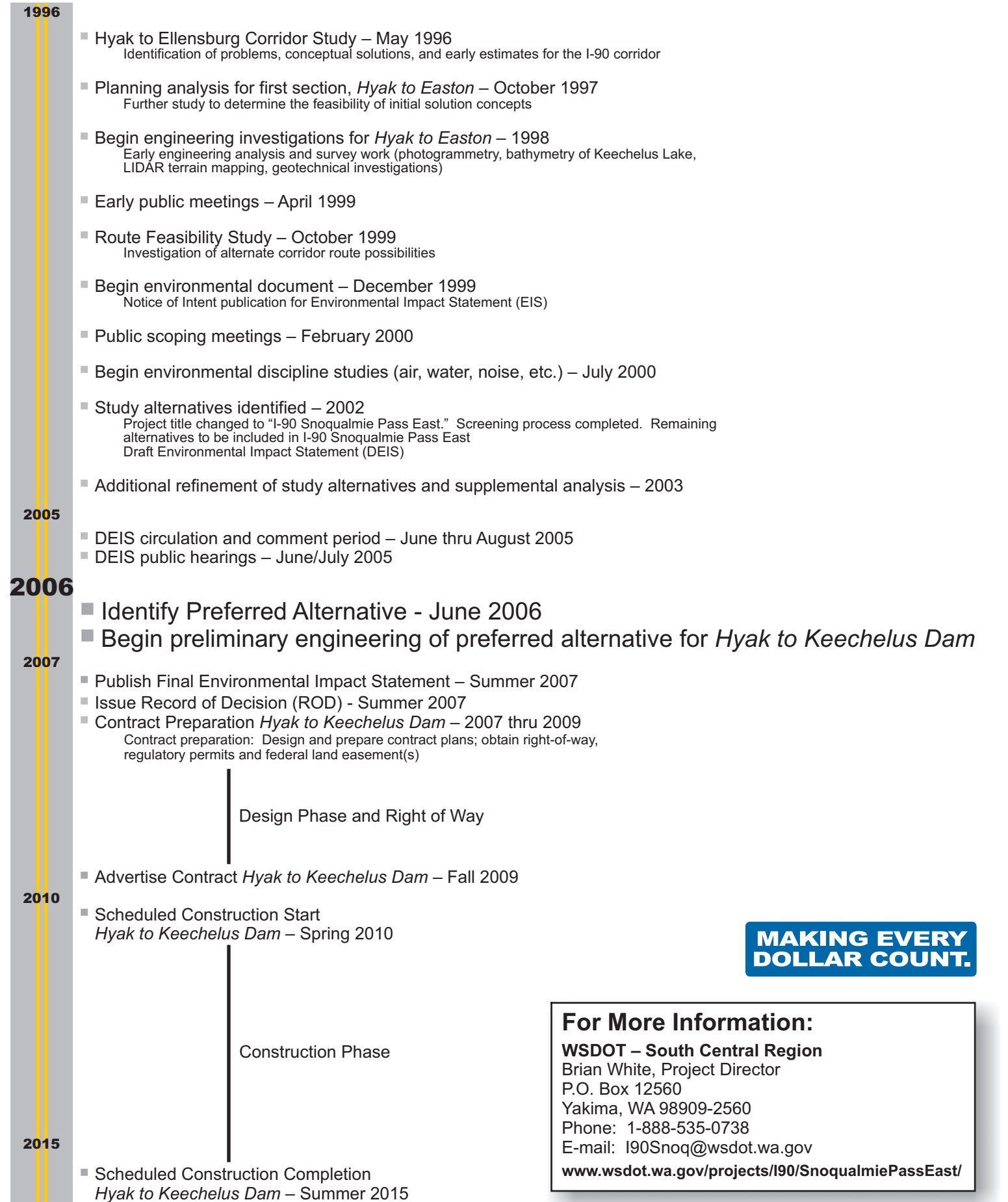


I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East – Project Timeline



I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East

CASCADE CONNECTION

Interstate 90 is a critical east–west transportation link connecting Puget Sound’s deep-water ports, large population centers, and varied retail/service businesses with the farmlands, diverse industries, and extensive outdoor recreational areas of Eastern Washington. The uninterrupted movement of cars, trucks, freight, and recreational vehicles across the Cascade Mountains and over Snoqualmie Pass is essential to our quality of life and the economic vitality of Washington State and the region.



Why is the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project important?



Traffic Volumes

I-90 is the primary east–west route for Washington State. Each year 35 million tons of freight and 10 million vehicles (including 2 million semi-trucks and numerous recreational vehicles) travel over Snoqualmie Pass. The average traffic volumes on this interstate are increasing by 3.5% each year, and daily usage has climbed as high as 58,000 vehicles during peak travel periods. These peak volumes already exceed the amount of traffic I-90 was designed to carry.



Safety

There are numerous sharp curves which limit sight distance throughout the corridor. Debris on the highway, or accidents, can create hazards that may not be seen in time for motorists to avoid. The Hyak to Easton section of I-90 has an accident rate double that of other rural sections. Winter storm events amplify the hazards caused by the sight distance and alignment problems through this section.



Ecological Connectivity

Snoqualmie Pass is within an area recognized as a critical connective link in the north/south movement of wildlife in the Cascade Range. Habitat diversity within the project area is high due to extreme differences in precipitation and elevation. Three distinct linkage zones have been identified within the project limits based on differences in biological communities. These communities include threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. The existing highway acts as a barrier bisecting these zones. An adequate connection between habitats on either side of I-90 is necessary for the continued health of these ecosystems, and the safety of both drivers and wildlife.

Avalanches and Closures

The Snoqualmie Pass summit on I-90 (elevation 3,022 feet) is the only section of interstate highway in Washington State with an operational plan for routine closures. Due to road conditions, accidents, and avalanches, the pass was closed for an average of 120 hours per year between 1992 and 2004. Of those closures, 80 hours per year were related to avalanches. It is conservatively estimated that avalanche closures cost business and private travelers \$17.5 million annually.



Deteriorating Pavement

The highway pavement on I-90 is between 30 and 50 years old. It has exceeded its lifespan and is in a state of rapid deterioration. Between 1993 and 1996, 120,000 dowel bars were installed to reinforce the cement concrete pavement, which will extend the pavement life to approximately the year 2010. Some sections with extensive cracking were also overlaid with asphalt pavement in 1998. Due to extreme weather conditions and heavy usage, the asphalt pavement rapidly deteriorated and was replaced three years later at a cost of \$1.5 million. As more cement and asphalt concrete pavement fails throughout the corridor, repeated overlay projects will be required. Increased frequency and lengths of overlay projects adds to traffic delays and taxpayer costs.



Ecological Connectivity Options

What are Connectivity Emphasis Areas?

Several streams and documented wildlife crossing locations have been identified as Connectivity Emphasis Areas (CEAs). At these locations, the highway divides significant habitats. The connection between those habitats needs to be improved.

Six of these CEAs had only one design option. At the remaining locations, there were multiple design options that provided varying degrees of connectivity. WSDOT evaluated these locations to identify a preferred alternative. There were over 3000 possible combinations of connectivity improvements. The CEAs were evaluated individually and then collectively to identify the preferred alternative.

The photos to the right depict connectivity improvement options. Compared to the existing conditions, any of the options would significantly enhance habitat connections and safety for drivers and wildlife in the area.



What are the options?



- Large structures sized to span multiple wildlife pathways and wetlands would provide wide-open crossings with minimum obstructions and allow safe movement of wildlife between habitats.
- Floodplains and channel migration zones would be enhanced to provide more natural conditions.



- Groups of moderately sized openings or wider structures spanning multiple pathways would provide greater opportunities for wildlife movement between habitats.
- Floodplains and channel migration zones would be greatly improved over existing conditions.



- Structures would be sized for hydraulic capacity, fish passage, and to improve opportunities for wildlife movement between habitats.
- Floodplains and channel migration zones would be improved over existing conditions.